

Transportforall

Accessible transport is our right

A response to the Mayor of London's
Transport Strategy. January 2010



Introduction

Transport for All is a pan-London organisation of disabled and older people that provides specialised advice, information, advocacy and training to both users and providers of accessible transport.

We have over two decades of experience in the accessible transport sector in London, and we welcome this chance to influence the Mayor of London's Transport Strategy.

Access to transport services remains a vitally important issue in the lives of disabled and older Londoners. It is the crucial factor enabling people to maintain independent lives and remain active citizens.

Restricted and lack of access to transport services leads to social isolation and has a negative impact on physical and mental well being.

We therefore believe that making London's transport network accessible - by removing the obstacles and barriers that prevent disabled and older people from travelling – must be seen as a political and funding priority by both the Mayor, Transport for London and the Government.

We also strongly believe that the principle of the 'Social model of disability' needs to be applied to all of the Mayor's work on transport. Viewing the inaccessibility of transport services as the factor that 'disables' people rather than an individual's impairments is vital if we are to make progress.

TfA generally does support the blue print laid out in the MTS, and we welcome the 'the whole journey approach' that has been mentioned. However guaranteed investment into London's transport infrastructure is the only way that this will be made into a reality – and we have concerns on how the recession and squeeze on public finances will impact on this.

Indeed so while TfA welcomes the fact that **‘Improving transport opportunities for all Londoners’** and **‘Improving the physical accessibility of the transport system’** are part of the MTS; we are concerned that accessibility plans have been the first victim of the funding cuts within TfL.

In particular the cutting of the step free tube programme is a great disappointment. (Please see p5)

We also believe that the Mayor and the MTS need to lay out clear plans on how disabled and older service users will be consulted and engaged with. TfA believes current consultation mechanisms are patchy and not adequate in many parts of the capital. (Please see p17)

Whilst we recognise the challenges that the Mayor and TfL face in delivering a world-class transport network – we believe that accessibility should be at the heart of all plans.

Faryal Velmi
Director
TfA

Transport for All deals with the transport enquiries and issues of hundreds of disabled and older people every year. Through our pan London outreach work we visit numerous organisations, groups and forums across London – listening to many different perspectives from a cross section of London’s disabled and older communities. It is these issues and everyday experiences that we have incorporated into this response.

Transport Proposals

Managing and enhancing the transport system

5.2

Crossrail

TfA welcomes the arrival of Crossrail in 2017 and the step free transport opportunities that will come with it. TfA is pleased so far with the accessibility commitments made on the project and urge the Mayor to follow them through. Indeed with the axing of the step free tube programme it remains the only project that will enable fast step free travel through central London.

We would like to urge the Mayor and TfL to engage in regular and genuine consultation with disabled Londoners on the Crossrail project to ensure the service will work for us.

Thameslink

TfA is pleased that a rail service to complement CrossRail is being built. However no accessibility details are listed which is a concern.

We would like clarification on what levels of accessibility can be expected from the £5.5bn Thameslink enhancement project.

National Rail

The Dept for Transport 'Access for All' programme is vital in tackling the inaccessible Rail network. While you can now travel on an accessible train from London to Manchester and beyond, using the suburban rail network is completely out of the question for some disabled and older Londoners.

Huge gaps between the train and the platform, as well as steep stairways coupled with dark and unstaffed stations make many parts of London's Rail network an undesirable way of travelling.

Therefore TfA wholeheartedly supports the measures laid out in **281** and Proposal **12** and **13**.

London Overground.

TfA again welcomes proposal **14** and with plans to make parts of the new orbital railway for London step free.

We would however like to see plans to expand the number of step free London Over ground stations and interchanges. Also we are concerned that these plans are ring fenced and not subject to cuts.

5.3

London Underground

TfA is very disappointed and concerned that plans to create a 'step free foundation network' of stations have been axed. The tube remains the fastest way to travel around London – yet it is out of bounds for many disabled and older people who have mobility impairments in particular.

This decision results in yet many more decades passing without the amelioration of this situation.

Whilst the financial reasons behind the decision is laid in the current TfL's current Business Plan – TfA believes that the decision will actually end up having a high social and financial cost of its own.

Indeed the Government aims to introduce Welfare and Incapacity benefit reform and get more disabled people back to work - how people will get to work has never been considered.

The removal of plans to make the Tube step free will have an impact on disabled people being able to travel to work.

TfA also believes that the decision will have a negative impact on the Olympics and Para Olympics in 2012 – as many thousands of people descend on the capital and use the Tube. Whilst stations like Green Park and Kings Cross will be made accessible; accessibility of travel will be severely compromised with the lack of step free travel in other parts of the network.

Further Improvements

TfA welcomes all the proposals **17-20**.

We would however like to add that in order for disabled passengers to use the accessible parts of the tube network freely - the lifts and escalators linking the street, ticket hall, platform and train must work.

If they break down at any level then access is severely diminished.

TfA notes that the private contractor, Tubelines has responsibility for the maintenance and repair of the lifts and escalators on parts of the Tube. From what we can gather, the response times for doing the repairs are not in the public domain.

In order to boost confidence in the Tube network, TfA would like to request that the Mayor and TfL publishes the response times to repair broken lifts and escalators.

5.4

London Buses

The introduction of the accessible bus fleet has been a huge victory for disabled campaigners. However a number of issues persist with the network which we would like the Mayor to address.

Faulty ramps

Improvements have been made to the reliability of ramps but still many bus companies are allowing buses to go out with faulty ramps.

This results in huge inconvenience for disabled passengers who then have to wait at bus stops for prolonged periods of time. TfA has heard many stories of disabled travellers being let down by a succession of buses with faulty ramps.

We would like the Mayor to address this important issue by more robust action against private bus companies who knowingly allow buses with faulty ramps to leave their depots. This could include increasing the penalty placed on these companies.

Buggies in the wheelchair space

This is an increasing problem across the London Bus network. All too often the wheelchair space is occupied by any number of buggies which prevent wheelchair users from travelling – and exacerbate overcrowding. Again TfA has heard many incidents where disabled passengers have had to wait for prolonged periods of time because of this frustrating problem.

We believe that bus driver training is a key factor in dealing with this situation.

Further Improvements

TfA would like to see more rigorous disability equality training for Bus drivers. This will equip them to better deal with disabled passengers; and indeed with parents with buggies who refuse to vacate the wheelchair space.

Other issues which are linked to improved customer care on the Bus network include:

- Better training to ensure that all drivers are willing and able to operate ramps,
- Ensuring all drivers are willing and able to use the ‘kneeling’ low floor capacity of buses.
- That service timetables allow for driving practises that are safe for disabled and older people. The later includes drivers pulling up to the curb and allowing passengers to find a seat before they pull out.
- Refresher courses and workshops with the involvement of disabled and older travellers would also enhance the initial training.

We strongly believe that without dealing with the issues raised in the above points, the accessibility of the Bus network is compromised.

Audio/visual/real time information on board buses and at bus stops

We welcome the rolling out of iBus, however action is needed to be taken when this feature is not turned on.

TfA welcomes Proposal **24** and the investment in the 'Countdown' display at bus stops and for enhanced real time information. This is especially important for travellers at night and in bad weather.

Scooters on Buses

Increasingly more disabled and older people are choosing to purchase and use electric mobility scooters. No doubt with an aging population, we will definitely be seeing more of them on our streets. Scooters provide users with a reliable and efficient way to get out and about locally; however longer distances are not possible as they run on re-chargeable electric batteries which run out. Therefore increasingly scooter users have expressed a wish to be able to board buses –and so increase the distant they can travel.

However there is much confusion as to when and where this can happen. Some scooter users tell us they can board local buses – while others say they are flatly refused.

TfA would like to see scooter users being able to use London's buses. We recognise that scooters come in all shapes and sizes, and have participated in research studies commissioned by TfL to determine what dimensions would be suitable. TfL would like to see the results of this consultation published and guidelines lay out as to what size scooter can travel on board our bus network.

Rollators using the wheelchair ramp

Again many older people like to use a walker or rollator to provide them with support when they are out and about.

TfA believes that Rollators users should be permitted to use the wheelchair ramps to board or alight the bus if they so wish.

The New Routemaster

TfA welcomes the fact that accessibility features have been integrated into the new Routemaster. However, again we feel that these features must be tried and tested by disabled service users before any money is spent in rolling out buses across the capital. Unless this consultation happens the buses cannot be called accessible.

5.5.4

Community Transport

TfA welcomes proposal **29** in the MTS to work closer with the Community Transport sector and the Community Transport Association.

Community Transport schemes operate a much valued service across London – providing cost effective, accessible and reliable transport to disabled and older Londoners and their groups.

There is a great diversity of services provided by CT schemes – with everything from coach hire to shopmobility schemes available to local residents. The local expertise and knowledge of CT providers make them invaluable partners to improve the quality and quantity of Door to Door transport (like Dial-A-Ride and Taxicard) provided by TfL.

However while some CT schemes have been contracted by D-A-R to fill the gaps in its service provision – the arrangement seems at best ad-hoc and patchy across London.

TfA would like to see the Mayor and TfL fully integrate local Community Transport schemes into its plans to enhance Door to Door service provision.

TfA also strongly believes that TfL and the Mayor need to put forward more detailed proposals as to how exactly local Community transport operators are going to be supported and engaged with. In particular we would like to see TfL and the Mayor

encourage local authorities through the Local Implementation Plan process to support their local CT schemes through funding and contract work.

5.6.3

Minimising the impact of planned interventions on the Road network.

TfA fully supports proposal **31**, as the disruption caused by road works can be a complete navigational nightmare for disabled people in particular – with everyone from people on mobility scooters to those who are visually impaired affected.

TfA would like the Mayor to consider the impact that road works have on disabled people; and along with the permit system detailed in the MTS, layout enforced measures to ensure that offending companies maintain accessible ways of getting around any works they inflict on our roads.

TfA would like to see ample notice given to passengers on the suspension of bus stops. This often causes much disruption, and we also strongly feel that relocated bus stops should be as close as possible to the original stop.

5.7.2

The Blue Ribbon network.

Making better use of the Thames for passenger services.

TfA agrees with the proposals to greater utilise the river Thames and improve and enhance river boat service provision. We would however like the Mayor to detail how accessibility will be factored into the proposals.

Our experience of using riverboats along the Thames is that while the piers are accessible – a significant number of boats are now.

Solutions like portable ramps or assistance given boarding and alighting would make River based services more accessible.

5.9

A more accessible transport system

Transport for All urges the Mayor to ensure that the funding to improve the accessibility of London's transport network is ring fenced. Currently this does not seem the case and TfA feels that this compromises the proposals laid out in this section – particularly in the current economic climate.

5.9.1

Improving the physical accessibility of the system.

The London Underground

Our view on the cut backs on Tube accessibility are detailed on Page 5.

Section 414 states that '**As the tube network is renewed, it will be made more accessible.**' We are disappointed at the lack of detail in this statement, and indeed in any stated intention that attempts will be made to plug the funding gap for Step Free tube access.

Further improvements

TfA agrees that improvements such as improved seating, tactile strips and contrasted handrails are necessary to improve accessibility and navigation of the underground network.

Improvements to the accessibility of the street environment.

TfA is strongly opposed to the idea of 'shared surfaces' – and believes that the removal of the curb, road markings and other navigational tools will make the streets dangerous and inaccessible to many disabled and older people, particular those with visual impairments.

We are disappointed that despite strong opposition from many disabled people and groups, this agenda is still being promoted by TfL.

The Blue Badge

The Blue Badge is an important scheme which is used by many disabled and older Londoners. The guarantee to maintain the 100% discount on the Blue Badge is welcomed.

There is however a central London exemption in operation which makes Blue parking very confusing and difficult in a number of central London boroughs.

TfA would like to see the Mayor work with the London Boroughs and the Dept of Transport to ensure Blue Badge holders in London have up to date and clear information as to where and when they can park in central London, so to avoid parking fines.

5.9.2

Enhancing information provision

TfA very much supports Proposal **41** and would urge the Mayor to consider providing pre-trip and in-trip information in a variety of accessible formats.

5.9.3

Improving staff service and the attitudes of customers

The assistance and good customer service of transport staff greatly enhances the experience of travelling in London. For disabled and older people the attitude of staff is an important factor in making a journey accessible. We therefore support proposal **43**

Attitudes of some Bus drivers in particular have been highlighted as an area of concern – with complaints including failure to stop for wheelchair users to not allowing passenger to sit down before accelerating off.

TfA would like to reiterate the point made on Page 7 – and see a more rigorous and service user led approach to training of transport staff.

In terms of the attitudes of other passengers – the anti social behaviour of school children in particular has been highlighted as a problem with older people and people with learning difficulties.

The enforcement of the priority seating on buses is also a serious concern and TfA would like to see more driver intervention via the P.A system to ensure that disabled and older people get a seat.

TfA would like to see the Mayor invest in a high profile publicity campaign across the transport network re-enforcing the fact that disabled and older people have the right to travel on public transport with the same freedom and choice as non-disabled people. We believe this would make a valuable contribution in the cultural shift that is needed to tackle disabilism, ageism and prejudice on the transport network.

Travel Mentoring

TfA supports plans by the Mayor in section **425** to support travel mentoring. TfA would like extra funding and resources for this useful confidence building scheme.

5.9.4

Door to Door transport

TfA is concerned that this section of the MTS lacks detail, content and any real direction. It could be understood from this that Door to Door transport is not a priority for the Mayor – which we believe is very worrying.

TfA would like to re-iterate our belief in an integrated door to door network that efficiently joins up existing Dial-A-Ride, Taxicard and Capital call services with links to local Community transport providers. We believe having **one** eligibility assessment and **one**

booking number would streamline the current system and be much more user-friendly, accessible and efficient.

Dial-A-Ride

For those users who can get through to the call centre, book a trip and get to where they want to be D-A-R is a god-send.

For those who cannot get a trip for the time or destination they want – or worse still those who are only offered a one way trip, outrightly refused or left stranded D-A-R is a problem.

TfA is therefore very concerned that the TfL business plan does not account for any growth in D-A-R's budget over the next few years. The Mayor has also stated that free rides are not sustainable. These two factors make for very alarming reading.

TfA believes that the Dial-A-Ride service should not be regarded as the poor relation in the TfL family. While millions of pounds are being pumped into the 'mainstream' public transport – there will always be a sizeable (and ever growing) population of Londoners who cannot make it to their nearest bus, tube or Crossrail stop to experience these changes. For them Door to door services like Dial-A-Ride are a vital life line.

We would like to see more money for Dial-A-ride services to expand its call centre and vehicle capacity. This would mean shorter telephone waiting times and the opportunity to travel further from home.

Freedom Pass honoured on DAR

For those disabled and older people who are able to utilise their Freedom pass, travelling is free. For those of us who need a greater level of assistance travelling from A to B can be very expensive.

TfA believes that disabled and older people who need Door to door transport should be treated equally and that the freedom pass should be honoured on Door to Door transport.

Guaranteed Trips

Tube and Bus passengers may have to wait to get on their desired form of transport – but at least they know its coming. For Dial-A-

Ride and Taxicard card users we are told there are no 'guaranteed trips'. That means that appointments and tickets for the theatre or cinema can often be missed.

TfA challenges the Mayor to provide all Door to Door service users with a guaranteed return trip – so that we can enjoy the assurance that others take for granted.

Taxicard

Taxicard is a greatly cherished service across the capital. Unfortunately however the Taxicard experience is a postcode lottery and where you live determines how you are assessed for eligibility, how many trips you get and how much you pay.

TfA would like to see the Mayor work with London Councils to provide equal access to the Taxicard service across London. This means parity of trips, the way assessment are carried out and how many trips members are given.

Capital call

The fact that Capital Call is not mentioned in the MTS is a bad omen – as the service has already been subject to cuts and changes.

The Capital Call scheme was introduced to supplement Taxicard in those boroughs where black cab availability is scarce. Indeed whilst it operates a small scale service for those who do use it is an important accessible transport option.

TfA is very concerned about the budget freeze that has been put on the service. This has resulted in the service being withdrawn from Kingston, Merton and Ealing (and allocated to Greenwich and Hackney). The membership has also been capped and trip limit has been introduced.

TfA would like express our concern at these changes and in particular at the trip limit being introduced. For those service users who have come to rely on the service it is of grave concern that

they will no longer be able to use it. We urge the Mayor to reconsider this budget freeze.

We are also concerned that the £200 travel budget allocated to users is often diminished by the account premium (CC trips are seen as an account job by most taxi firms) added to the cost of the trip. This means that 'cash' bookings are often cheaper than a Capital call trip.

5.12.

The Walking and Cycling revolution

We welcome the emphasis put on walking (or rolling for wheelchair users), however urge the Mayor to recognise the specific concerns that disabled and older people have when hitting the streets.

There have been many improvements to paving, audible signals at crossings, measures to remove street clutter and the introduction of tactile paving. But standards are different from borough to borough, and enforcement is patchy.

TfA would like urge the Mayor to set consistent standards and designs for accessible streets across London. We would also like to see a Shopmobility scheme in every town centre as they provide an excellent way for people to get out and about and do their shopping. Also we urge stronger action against cyclists who mount the road and who cycle through red lights.

Get on your tryke.

TfA also brings to the Mayor's attention the increasing number of disabled cyclists who use trykes or other adapted cycles. We would like to see these types of cycles available in the hire scheme that the Mayor wishes to roll out by 2010. Furthermore some of the funding should be directed toward organisations that promote cycling to disabled people.

7.3

Delivery Process

Consultation with disabled and older service users –

‘Nothing about us without us’.

With billions of pounds being directed towards improving the transport network –TfA strongly urges the Mayor to involve disabled service users in the planning, developing and monitoring of services outlined in this MTS. Regular and genuine consultation must occur on a local borough wide and pan London level between disabled and older service users and transport providers and commissioners. Otherwise services will simply not work for us.

For many years, TfA has championed the idea of borough wide **Mobility forums** as key arenas of engagement and consultation between service providers and service users.

Indeed the formation of mobility forums were included in the first Mayor’s Transport Strategy.

A number of boroughs have invested in mobility forums and they work towards bridging the gap between users and providers. However the situation is patchy across the capital with a deficit in consultation occurring in many parts of London. Indeed this is the case despite the fact the L.I.P process should include consultation with disabled and older people and initiatives like the Disability Equality Duty.

A situation where every local borough had a functioning Mobility forum and sent a representative to a Pan London forum - would radically alter this and provide ample opportunity for disabled and older service users to communicate their experiences to TfL. Lack of funds and resources are the key reasons as to why some boroughs are reluctant to set up mobility forums, despite an urgent need expressed by local disabled and older people.

<p>We want the Mayor to work with London boroughs to set mobility forums and investigate ways to provide financial support to those boroughs who are interested in consulting with disabled and older service users.</p>
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